

Message Text

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72

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 DRC-01 /096 W

----- 101547

R 062119Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5653

INFO AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SREF SGEN HA BF

SUBJ: GCOB MOVES AGAINST ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

1. AS THE LATEST STEP IN GCOB EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, PARTICULARLY THAT COMING FROM HAITI, HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER DARRELL ROLLE HAS ANNOUNCED A TWO-WEEK AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ALREADY IN THE BAHAMAS, NEW RESTRICTIONS ON HAITIAN SHIPPING, AND THE PROMISE OF HARSH ACTION AGAINST ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS IN THE FUTURE.

2. ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION HAS BECOME A DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE BAHAMAS, BASED ON RISING UNEMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL XENOPHOBIA AMONG LOWER BAHAMIAN INCOME GROUPS. ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANT WHO SHOT AND WOUNDED ABACO POLICEMAN LAST DECEMBER IN ATTEMPT TO AVOID IMMIGRATION ROUND-UP HAS JUST BEEN SENTENCED TO TEN YEARS FOR ATTEMPTED MURDER, AN UNUSUALLY HARSH PENALTY. LAST MONTH'S TRAGIC DROWNING OF AT LEAST 19 WOULD-BE IMMIGRANTS JUST OUTSIDE NASSAU'S HARBOUR HAS ALSO BROUGHT POLITICAL PRESSURE TO BEAR.

3. ROLLE ANNOUNCED THAT ALL ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS WILL HAVE TWO WEEKS TO (A) LEAVE THE BAHAMAS VOLUNTARILY, (B) TURN THEM-

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SELVES IN TO BAHAMIAN POLICE OR IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES IF

THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO REPATRIATE THEMSELVES (COMMENT: GIVEN WIDE-SPREAD RUMORS OF MISTREATMENT OF HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS IN LOCAL PRISON, IT MAY BE DOUBTFUL THAT MANY WILL TAKE THIS OPTION), AND (C) APPLY TO DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM DEPORTATION BECAUSE OF "SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES". AT THE END OF TWO WEEKS, ROLLE PROMISED A MASSIVE ROUND-UP OF ALL ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS AND THE IMPOSITION OF SEVERE PENALTIES ON ANYONE FOUND EMPLOYING THEM (NOTE: MANY ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS ARE EMPLOYED AS MAIDS AND GARDENERS, AND THIS FEATURE MAY BE AN ATTEMPT TO ENCOURAGE EMPLOYERS TO TURN IN EMPLOYEES.

4. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM HAITI WAS RECEIVING SPECIAL TREATMENT, ROLLE ANNOUNCED THE FOLLOWING MEASURES CONCERNING HAITIAN SHIPPING: (A) ALL VESSELS 100 TONS AND UNDER ARE PROHIBITED FROM CALLING AT BAHAMIAN PORTS OTHER THAN MATTHEW TOWN IN SOUTHERN INAGUA, WHERE THEY MUST DISCHARGE CARGOES AND RETURN TO HAITI WITHIN 48 HOURS; (B) CREWS ON SUCH VESSELS SHALL NOT EXCEED NINE PERSONS PER VESSEL AND EACH CREW MEMBER MUST BE VISAED BY THE BAHAMIAN MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS; (C) GCOB WILL "DISCOURAGE" THE ARRIVAL OF VISITORS TO THE BAHAMAS ABOARD HAITIAN VESSELS; (D) UPON THE EXPIRATION OF THE TWO-WEEK AMNESTY, BAHAMIAN MARINE POLICE WILL HAVE STANDING INSTRUCTIONS TO "STOP, BOARD AND SEARCH ANY VESSEL WITHIN THE TERRITORIAL WATERS OF THE BAHAMAS SUSPECTED OF CARRYING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS OR COMMITTING ANY INFRINGEMENT OF BAHAMIAN LAW."

5. COMMENT: APPARENT GCOB STRATEGY IS TO "SCARE HAITIANS OFF" AND THEN MOVE IN ON THOSE REMAINING. GIVEN RELATIVE ABSENCE OF OTHER ECONOMIC OR GEOGRAPHIC ALTERNATIVES FOR MOST ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS PRESENTLY IN THE BAHAMAS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT MANY WILL DEPART VOLUNTARILY DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. ISSUE WILL THEN BECOME ABILITY OF POLICE AND IMMIGRATION OFFICERS TO IDENTIFY, ARREST AND DETAIN LARGE NUMBERS OF IMMIGRANTS, WILLINGNESS OF BAHAMIANS TO TURN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN, AND EFFORTS OF SOME SUCH IMMIGRANTS TO BUY IMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH SITUATION HAS POTENTIAL TO BECOME INCREASINGLY SORDID, ROLLE'S STRONG STAND AND FURTHER MEASURES PROMISED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNDER IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY MEET WITH THE APPROVAL OF ALL POTENT SEGMENTS OF BAHAMIAN OPINION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: IMMIGRATION CONTROL, IMMIGRANTS, SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: smithrj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974NASSAU01028
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740149-0231
From: NASSAU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740669/aaaachmt.tel
Line Count: 110
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: smithrj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 SEP 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <14 FEB 2003 by smithrj>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GCOB MOVES AGAINST ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS
TAGS: PGOV, SREF, SGEN, HA, BF
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005